



Democratic transition in post-Soviet Europe

The incomplete process of democratization in Ukraine, Belarus
and Moldova

Valgerður Björk Pálsdóttir

Lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórnmálafræði

Félagsvísindasvið



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Ritgerð þessi er lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórnmálafræði og er óheimilt að afrita ritgerðina á nokkurn hátt nema með leyfi rétthafa.

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Útdráttur

Í þessari ritgerð er fjallað um lýðræðisvæðingu í þremur löndum sem tilheyrðu Sovétríkjunum; Úkraínu, Hvíta-Rússlandi og Moldóvu. Ferlið er skoðað á þeim tuttugu árum sem liðin eru frá falli Sovétríkjanna. Tilgreind lönd höfðu takmarkaða reynslu af sjálfstæði og lýðræði þegar krafa var gerð um að stjórnaritari þeirra yrði umbreytt þar sem kommúnistastjórnin hafði látið af völdum. Helsta áskorun þessara ríkja var að skapa ný lýðræðisleg stjórnkerfi en það verkefni hefur mistekist hjá öllum ríkjunum á umbreytingatímabili þeirra. Lýðræðislegir stjórnarhættir hafa ekki verið áberandi í Úkraínu, Hvíta-Rússlandi né Moldóvu og hefur ekkert ríkja náð að umbreyta stjórnkerfi sínu frá alræði til lýðræðis. En af hverju er lýðræðisvæðingin komin á svo stuttan veg í þessum löndum? Í ritgerðinni eru fimm þættir sem kynntir eru út af fyrir sig sem að mínu mati hafa stuðlað hvað mest að takmarkaðri lýðræðisvæðingu í öllum löndunum. Þeir eru stjórnmalaflokkar, pólitísk forysta, borgaralegt samfélag, ytri aðilar og mótun þjóðernis. Fyrst er farið yfir hvern þátt fyrir sig í öllum löndunum og í lokin eru þættirnir metnir út frá áhrifunum sem þeir hafa haft á lýðræðisvæðinguna.

Niðurstöður sýna að skort á lýðræðisvæðingu í Úkraínu má rekja til þess að pólitísk völd eiga rætur að rekja til svæðisskiptrar kosningahegðunar sem er orðinn rótgróinn hluti af hinu pólitíska samfélagi í Úkraínu sem og spilltir “óligarkar”. Í Hvíta-Rússlandi er sterk staða forsetaembættisins aðal orsök takmarkaðrar lýðræðisvæðingar þar sem einræðisherra hefur verið gert kleift að ná völdum með spilltum aðgerðum. Í Moldóvu hefur mótun þjóðernis og vandamál tengd þjóðarbrotum og þjóðarímynd verið áberandi síðan Moldóva varð sjálfstætt ríki. Sá þáttur ásamt spilltri stjórn kommúnistanna sem réð þar ríkjum í átta ár hefur verið aðal fyrirstaða þess að lýðræðisvæðing geti átt sér stað í landinu.

Abstract

This thesis examines the democratization process in three former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova in the twenty years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. These countries had limited experience with independence and democracy when they were forced to go through a regime change from Communism to a new kind of rule. The challenge was to create a democratic political system but Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova have all failed to do so in their post-Soviet transitional paths. A consolidated democracy has not been established in any of the countries but why have these countries failed to democratize? In the thesis, five factors are introduced separately within each country which have arguably contributed the most to the incomplete process of democratization. They are political parties, political leadership, civil society, external actors and nation-building. In the end, each factor is analyzed according to its influence on democratization in each country.

Results show that in Ukraine democratization has failed due to the regionalization of political power which has led to a political system of oligarchs whose main interest is to serve their own needs. In Belarus, the main cause of the lack of democratization is the introduction of the strong presidency which has resulted in a sultanistic regime where the president has power over every aspect of the political system. Moldova's lack of democratization is derived from two factors; the ethnic and nation-building problems the Moldovan government has had to focus on and the authoritarian governance of the Communist elite.

Formáli

Ritgerð þessi er lokaverkefni mitt til BA prófs í stjórn málafræði við Háskóla Íslands. Hún er metin til 12 eininga (ECTS) af 180 eininga námi. Leiðbeinandi minn var Silja Bára Ómarsdóttir og ber ég henni kærar þakkir fyrir góða leiðsögn, aðhald og áreiðanleika við vinnslu ritgerðarinnar. Einnig vil ég þakka Söru Harðardóttur fyrir yfirlestur ritgerðar. Að lokum vil ég þakka Linu Klymenko, kennara mínum við Vínarháskóla fyrir góða kynningu á aðstæðum í Úkraínu, Hvíta-Rússlandi og Moldóvu þar sem námskeið hennar varð mér mikill innblástur. Námskeiðið veitti mér einnig greiðan aðgang að ýmsum heimildum sem komu að gagni við vinnslu ritgerðarinnar, sem margar hverjar eru ekki aðgengilegar hér á landi eins og er.

Table of Contents

Útdráttur.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Formáli.....	5
Introduction.....	7
1. Theoretical framework.....	9
2. Ukraine.....	15
2.1. Political parties.....	15
2.2. Political leadership.....	17
2.3. Civil society.....	19
2.4. External actors.....	21
2.5. Nation-building.....	23
3. Belarus.....	25
3.1. Political parties.....	25
3.2. Political leadership.....	26
3.3. Civil society.....	29
3.4. External actors.....	30
3.5. Nation-building.....	32
4. Moldova.....	34
4.1. Political parties.....	34
4.2. Political leadership.....	36
4.3. Civil society.....	38
4.4. External actors.....	39
4.5. Nation-building.....	41
5. Results.....	43
5.1. Ukraine.....	43
5.2. Belarus.....	46
5.3. Moldova.....	47
6. Conclusion.....	49
Bibliography.....	51

Introduction

Twenty years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it is interesting to look at how far the former Soviet republics have come in their process of democratization. Living under Communist rule for decades, the newly independent states had no or very limited experience with democracy or independence. They faced a new project of creating their own democratic political systems. This thesis examines how the former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova have developed their political system in the framework of their post-Soviet transitional paths. Although these countries share a common Soviet history, geographical proximity and a similar regime change in 1991, their journey to democracy has taken different paths. They have faced similar challenges but the outcome of the transition from Communist rule to another form of government has been divergent between countries.

I chose these three former Soviet states because of their position in Europe and their proximity to the European Union. I was surprised how little I knew about these particular countries which all have borders to EU member states. They have often been grouped together as the Eastern European post-Soviet states, thus distinguished from other groupings such as the Baltic states, Central Asian states and Transcaucasian states. Some of the commonalities shared by Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova are their Soviet past, close relations with Russia, large Russian national minorities within their borders, the widely used Russian language, a powerless civil society and a weak national identity. What defines them all as well is an unstable and corrupt political system, but all of these factors will be examined further in this paper.

The aim of this thesis is to examine democratic transition in post-Soviet Europe with a focus on the three previously mentioned states. In this thesis, I set out to answer the question “why has democratization failed in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova?” but I claim that these countries have not yet established consolidated democracies. The focus will be on political development in the transition period so far, even though I realize that economic and social development are important factors as well but they are outside the scope of this paper. The main factors I believe have contributed to the failure of democratization in these countries are political parties, political leadership, civil society, external actors and nation-building. In the paper, there will be an overview of each factor within each country and lastly each factor will be examined according to its influence on democratization. The results will demonstrate which factors pose as the main obstacle to democratization in each country.

This thesis is a bibliographic research paper. The sources that are used consist mostly of scholarly reviewed articles published in scientific journals. Most of them were collected at the University of Vienna where the last year of my studies took part. The structure of this thesis will be as follows; in the next chapter, theories of democratic transition and un-democratic political systems will be introduced to help develop a clear understanding of the causes of the failure of democratization. Then each country is addressed in separate chapters with five subchapters including examination of the contributing factors already mentioned. After having researched all factors within each country, results are developed and a conclusion is drawn.

1. Theoretical framework

The so-called “third wave” of democratization is a term coined by Samuel Huntington and introduced in the beginning of the 1990s. He claimed that a global trend was underway with countries stepping out from dictatorship and transitioning to democracy. There were supposedly thirty countries shifting from authoritarian regimes towards a more democratic system of government in the time period of 1974 to 1990.¹ Today, scholars refer to the post-Cold War era as the “fourth wave” but not referring only to a regime transition from authoritarianism to democracy but rather a regime change to democracy *and* dictatorship, since the theory of the “third wave” has not stood its ground and has been widely criticized for assuming that the countries in transition are actually moving towards democracy which in many cases they are definitely not.²

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, most of the states abandoned communism but only a few states have now become consolidated democracies whereas others remain unconsolidated transitional regimes or have resolidified as authoritarian regimes.³ Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova have gone both different and similar paths in their transition period from 1991, but in the beginning of the transition period and after they gained sovereignty, they all showed signs of going through a democratic transition. Today though, Ukraine and Moldova seem to be stuck somewhere in the “grey zone” with some signs of democratization while Belarus can not be regarded as a country in transition to democracy since in, 1994 a president was elected whose regime has been described as the “last dictatorship in Europe”.⁴

The term “democratic transition” has been inaccurately applied in the literature about regime change in the third wave and I find it hard to use this term because it is not yet clear if the countries of my study are in fact moving towards democracy or even trying to establish a consolidated democracy. The term “democratic transition” is defined by Stradiotto and Guo as

¹ Samuel Huntington, “Democracy’s Third Wave,” *Political Science Quarterly* 106, 4 (1991-1992): 579.

² Lucan A. Way, “Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine,” *World Politics* 57 (Jan 2005): 232-233. Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy *and* Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World,” *World Politics* 54 (Jan 2002): 212.

³ McFaul, 2002, 212.

⁴ Natalia Leshchenko, “The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, 8 (Oct 2008): 1419. David Marples, “Europe’s Last Dictatorship: The Roots and Perspectives of Authoritarianism in White Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, 6 (2005): 903.

a political process initiated either from below or above which has the aim of establishing a consolidated democratic political system where the electorate is free to choose its authority, democratic values are promoted, opposition is tolerated, pluralistic structures are institutionalized and different political forces are allowed to compete for power.⁵ Since I doubt that I will be able to apply this definition to any of my case study countries in any time period of their transition I will instead describe what they are going through as a “regime transition” which is the “interval between one political regime and another”.⁶ The term “consolidated democracy” can be used when a democratic transition is completed and when the elite have accepted behaviorally, attitudinally and constitutionally that democracy is the only way to use to govern. Also, the public has to accept this as well and a democracy is not consolidated until the rule of democracy becomes internalized and routinized in social, institutional and private life.⁷

Many theories have been developed by transition scholars and I will introduce a range of theories I believe can explain the different transition outcomes of the three countries in consideration to the different political system in different time periods, since for example, one theory can not explain the regime transition of Belarus because the political sphere is different now than it was before the election of president Lukashenko and the same goes with Moldova before and after the Communists were elected in 2001.

Many of the former Soviet republics have in their transition entered a political “grey zone” where they seem to be stuck in between the form of dictatorship and democracy whereas neither rule is fully practiced. They have been called “hybrid” regimes and they have some attributes of democracy including regularly held elections which in some, but not all cases are free and fair, democratic constitutions, some political space for opposition groups as well as a relatively independent civil society. However, there are democratic deficits in almost every sphere of the political life including uncertain legitimacy of elections, low levels of political participation except for voting, the rule of law is frequently abused by the elite and

⁵ Gary A. Stradiotto and Sujian Guo, “Transitional Modes of Democratization and Democratic Outcomes,” *International Journal on World Peace* 27, 4 (Dec 2010): 10.

⁶ Ibid, 9.

⁷ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*. (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 3-6.

institutions are often not democratic.⁸ Therefore, countries in the “grey zone” can be labeled as defective democracies which are not necessarily transitional regimes. Sometimes they don’t develop into a consolidated democracy or an autocracy, but stay put in the “grey zone” as defective democracies for a long period of time.⁹

Thomas Carothers has stated that countries that have entered the “grey zone”, don’t move so easily out of it and it needs to be understood that this political situation is stable and an alternative direction in their regime change, not just a quick stop that they have to go through before they go onwards in their journeys of becoming democracies.¹⁰ Within the “grey zone” are theories that can help us understand different regime transition and outcomes. The ones that I will use are pluralism by default and competitive authoritarianism.

The theory of pluralism by default was developed by Lucan A. Way, a specialist on regime development in post-communist Eurasia. He claims that Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova were all trying to build authoritarian regimes in the aftermath of the breakdown of the Soviet Union but as he states, authoritarian consolidation failed in the beginning and through the mid 1990s. In fact, these countries experienced quite a competitive political scene at that time and there was indeed pluralism in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. The pluralism existed even though these states had a lack of democratic history, weak rule of law, a powerless civil society and limited external relations with the international community, except for Russia.¹¹

In a state of pluralism by default, competitive politics and pluralism is not a result of strong democratic institutions or leadership, or a robust civil society. Rather, the pluralism results from the “inability of incumbents to maintain power or concentrate political control.”¹² The elite are fragmented and unable to use force against the opposition, control the media or manipulate elections. Even though civil society is weak, the fragmented political elite is not able to use that to its advantage and establish authoritarian rule. So incumbents are unable to take control over state- and economic sources and that generates political competition. It is not that the political elite desires and tries to establish democratic rule with competitive

⁸ Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, 1 (2002): 9-10. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, 2 (2002): 51.

⁹ Wolfgang Merkel, “Embedded and Defective Democracies,” *Democratization* 11, 5 (2004): 33, 49.

¹⁰ Carothers, 2002, 13-14.

¹¹ Way, 2005, 231-232.

¹² *Ibid*, 232.

political arena, the fact is that the elite doesn't have enough control over the state nor the capacity to get rid of the democratic factors that persist.¹³

To be able to establish an authoritarian state, the ruling party needs to use top-down control and according to Way, leaders must try to limit open criticism, manipulate elections, have the military on their side and deal with already existent and inflexible legislature. These challenges must be faced by political leaders but where there is pluralism by default, that has not been the case and such failure leads to a failed authoritarian political system.¹⁴

Another theory by Way which he developed with Steven Levitsky is competitive authoritarianism, another type of "hybrid" regime in the "grey zone". Since countries in the "grey zone" are not considered democracies, the authors do not want to use the word "democracy" to describe the situation of these countries, although many scholars have done so by using words as "partial", "semi" and "diminished" along with "democracy". Instead, they find it better to describe these regimes as a form of authoritarianism.¹⁵ The theory implies that where competitive authoritarianism exists, the primary means of gaining and keeping power is through elections which are regularly held and generally free of massive fraud. Elections are important for competitive authoritarian states because the ruling elite seek legitimacy domestically as well as internationally.¹⁶

In competitive authoritarianism, there is usually one political group or elite which dominates the political scene. There is also a blurred line between the state and the ruling party. What makes a competitive authoritarian regime different from a fully authoritarian one is the toleration of opposition. However, this does not mean that the elite accept the opposition as important players in democracies. Frequent serious violations by the ruling party occur in fields which make up democracies which according to Way and Levitsky are; civil and political rights including freedom of the press, legitimate governance where the leaders do not derive their control from the military or religious sectors, non-discrimination regarding voting rights and legislative and executive power is chosen through free and fair elections.

Regular abuses of the factors which make up democracies occur in competitive authoritarian regimes. They make it impossible to call these regimes democratic since the violations can create inequality between the opposition and incumbent government who strive

¹³ Levitsky and Way, 2002, 62-63.

¹⁴ Lucan A. Way, "Pluralism by Default in Moldova," *Journal of Democracy* 13, 4 (2002): 127-132.

¹⁵ Levitsky and Way, 2002, 52.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 53

for political control.¹⁷ Examples of violations that occur in competitive authoritarian regimes are harassment, imprisonment and even assault or murder of opposition leaders and journalists who openly criticize the governing elite. But these actions are all performed behind the scene, the elite do not openly violate democratic rules which would make the regime fully authoritarian. Corruption and scandals take place in the form of bribery, co-optation and the use of state agencies to harass opponents. The elite make it seem legal in the eyes of the domestic and international media since international isolation is not in the interest of the ruling elite.¹⁸

The concept of authoritarianism has been widely used to describe non-democratic regimes which do not fall into the category of the “grey zone” and do not seem to be in transition to democracy in any case. However, I feel that the theory will not fit very well to my case study countries because as Juan Linz states, the structural differences among the countries described as authoritarian are too vast and the term includes governments with distinctive characteristics that can range from short-lived single-party regimes to military regimes, from royal dictatorship to highly institutionalized regimes. What I choose to use instead is sultanism, a theory developed by Linz who borrows the term from Max Weber who in turn used it to refer to extreme cases of patrimonialism.¹⁹

The most significant characteristic of sultanism is that the fusion of private and public is high and the political leadership is highly personalistic and arbitrary where the fate of the state is closely bound up with the fate of the leader. The ruler (sultan) chooses his elite which often consists of family members and friends. The sultan is glorified and he uses symbols to manipulate the population. An elaborated ideology is nonexistent in the sultan’s regime and there is never any attempt to justify major initiatives on the basis of ideology. There is no rule of law, low institutionalization and the civil society is not free, the ruler holds legislative power, controls the media and puts restrictions on political and civil society groups.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lucan A. Way, “The Sources and Dynamics of Competitive Authoritarianism in Ukraine,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 20, 1 (2004): 149-151.

¹⁹ H. E. Chehabi and Juan Linz, “A Theory of Sultanism 1: A Type of Nondemocratic Rule,” in *Sultanistic Regimes*, ed. by H. E. Chehabi and Juan Linz. (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 3-4.

²⁰ Linz and Stepan, 1996, 44-45, 52-53. Steven Eke and Taras Kuzio, “Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, 3 (2000): 531-532.

Because of the high fusion of private and public, corruption thrives. Political pluralism is very limited because political power is in the hands of the ruler but economic and social pluralism does not disappear, but is nonetheless subject to intervention of the ruler. The public is not directly mobilized to join the political arena even though they are encouraged to support the ruler indirectly with wide displays of nationalistic symbols and large photographs of the president in public places. Sultanistic regimes are very unpredictable since political actions by the ruler are often contradictory.²¹

²¹ Ibid.

2. Ukraine

2.1. Political parties

To be able to achieve democratic consolidation, there needs to be a developed political society with active political parties whose leaders the population can identify themselves with and trust to democratically govern their country. After Ukraine gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and after the defeat of the Communist Party, the party development in Ukraine was slow and unstable. Nonparty governments were formed after elections in the time period of 1991-1998 because dominating parties were lacking. There was no real party structure within the factions and groups that formed the government. After 1998, when the mixed electoral system replaced the majority system, the political system started to develop and parties became less fragmented and started to institutionalize themselves.²²

Today as was the case from 1998, most parties are formed from above. A lot of them are catch-all parties with no strong guiding ideology and no long-term strategies in place. Political dialogue is also rare. The number of parties is very high, there are usually around 100 active parties but in 2010, 182 political parties were registered.²³ Most of them are small and poorly organized with a lack of party discipline, so the whole party system is unstable and ineffective.²⁴

Public confidence in parties is weak as well as identification with parties. The public is not mobilized to join political parties and according to a survey conducted by SOGISA-Gallup in 1999, where 1200 Ukrainians were asked about their political parties, only 1% claimed to belong to a political party and 83% stated that the likelihood of joining one was low.²⁵ So it looks like Ukrainians are skeptical about parties and their ability to bring about changes in the country. But what are the causes of the fragmented party system in Ukraine? First of all, the party system that developed in the country is strongly shaped by the Soviet regime legacies where the elite groups which were potent in the Soviet Ukraine when the regime change started to take place, had the chance to influence the institutionalization of the

²² Andrei Tarnauski, "The Peculiarities of Party Politics in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine: Institutionalization or Marginalization?" in *Political Parties in Post-Soviet Space*, ed. Anatoly Kulik and Susanna Pshizova. (Westport: Praeger, 2005): 47.

²³ Kyiv Post, "Youth into Power registered," <http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/71765/> (accessed July 20 2011).

²⁴ Paul Kubicek, "The Limits of Electoral Democracy in Ukraine," *Democratization* 8, 2 (2001): 124-126.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

new political system in conformity with their ideas and interests. The second factor is the regional segregation of the electorates but to the voters the region in which they live plays a crucial role in determining who they will vote for.²⁶ These two factors will hereby be examined further in order to explain how the defective political party system in Ukraine is a contributing factor to the failure of democratization of the country.

In post-Soviet Ukraine, politics and business never really became separate units and therefore there was never a clear distinction between the political and economic elite. This Soviet legacy carried on in Ukraine even after the breakup with the Soviet Union. In 1996, economic groups which consist of oligarchs, many of whom were former members of the Soviet *nomenklatura*, started to form along regional lines. Today, these clans are well integrated into the political system and play an extensive role in Ukraine's political society. The Ukrainian parliament is mostly made up of centrist oligarchic parties whose social basis is concentrated in one or two regions and their actions are rarely justified by a practicing ideology. Their so-called "ideology" can best be described as being based on populism and catch-all practices, where they often change their position in accordance to public opinion.²⁷

Oligarchs are wealthy people who are connected to the state bureaucracy, they are usually strategically placed in parliament by the president to support him and in exchange they get access to the country's economic resources. The oligarchic system in Ukraine emerged during president Leonid Kuchma's first term from 1994 to 1999. The main economic actors in the country established centrist parties where they could get voted into parliament and then reward their supporters with economic favors when privatization of the economic sector took place but all economic reforms had been delayed from 1991 to 1994. The corrupt oligarchs did not hesitate to use their power to participate in "behind the scene" measures during the economic reforms, which only enhanced their power both in the political system as well as the public sphere.²⁸

As previously mentioned, the political party system in Ukraine is fragmented along regional lines and a study based on public opinion polls in Ukraine from 1995 and 1997 underlines this as the data shows that voting behavior can be prognosticated if the region of

²⁶ Kerstin Zimmer and Olexiy Haran, "Unfriendly takeover: Successor parties in Ukraine," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41 (2008): 542-546.

²⁷ Tarnauski, 2005, 44-49.

²⁸ Rosaria Puglisi, "The Rise of the Ukrainian Oligarchs," *Democratization* 10, 3 (2003): 99-116.

the voter is already known.²⁹ In every election held since 1990, a significant divide between voting results in the East and the West/Center has been prominent. The democratic opposition derives its support from the central and western part of the country whereas the eastern part supports oligarchs and centrist parties. In the East, the population is passive in between elections and the civil society is inactive. Citizens are only mobilized through pressure or financial inducements where powerful economic actors do not try to fight for a more democratized political society since that would risk their own status. Three main clans in Ukraine unite oligarch, regional and political interests and they are all situated in the East. The electorate in the East tends to cast their votes in these directions. In the West and central Ukraine, civil society is rather lively and takes part in mobilizing the population during and in between elections. People in these parts of the country are more reform-oriented and are more open to vote for opposition forces like Our Ukraine, the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc and the Socialist Party of Ukraine, even though the democratic values of these parties can be contested.³⁰

2.2. Political leadership

Ukraine has never had a very uncorrupt and democratic president whose ties were not connected to oligarchic groups. All of Ukraine's presidents have been accused of using corrupt means in their governance including those in office after the Orange Revolution in 2004, although it was supposed to lead the country into democratic consolidation.³¹ The literature has focused most on president Kuchma who is the only president to have served two terms, from 1994 to 2005 so I will mostly focus on the political leadership in Ukraine in the Kuchma era and also shortly after the Orange Revolution.

Kravchuk, who was the first president and served until 1994, has usually been regarded as more democratic than his successor even though he, as well as Kuchma, did not hesitate to use undemocratic and corrupt acts to limit the power and media access of the opposition. When they felt that their power was threatened, they were both ready to use "behind the scene" physical force against their opponents which could usually not be linked back to them. The difference between Kravchuk and Kuchma lies in the strong desire to gain

²⁹ Vicki Hesli, William Reisinger and Arthur Miller, "Political Party Development in Divided Societies: the Case of Ukraine," *Electoral Studies* 17, 2 (1998): 235-236.

³⁰ Taras Kuzio, "Regime type and politics in Ukraine under Kuchma," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (2005): 169-170.

³¹ Paul Kubicek, "Problems of post-post-communism: Ukraine after the Orange Revolution," *Democratization* 16, 2 (2009): 324-327.

personal power in the day-to-day management of the country, but it has been stated that Kravchuk mainly desired the powerful position of the president without having to worry about the daily operations of the government.³²

The case was very different with president Kuchma, who strived for greater control of all aspects of government during his two terms. In 2000, a national referendum was held which would greatly enhance the power of the president versus parliament. Over 80% of voters approved the four questions laid out by Kuchma which gave him more control, for example the power to dismiss parliament under certain circumstances.³³ The presidency thus became the key institution and it became quite isolated from both the parliament and the electorate which allowed for further consolidation of the oligarchs in parliament. Kuchma had a close relationship with the oligarchs in parliament and when he was voted president, he managed to secure his friends official positions in the state administration and parliament. Kuchma therefore was able to seal his power and maintain authority through his extensive network of friends and colleagues.³⁴

The political leadership of Kuchma became especially controversial in 2000 when he was accused of being involved in the kidnapping and killing of a journalist who had criticized the media publicly.³⁵ The distrust towards the president by the public was evident when two thirds of Ukrainians said they were not surprised by these allegations in a survey reported in *Ukraine List*. This example of the so-called “Kuchmagate” case is the far worst case concerning corruption allegations against the president but there are numerous other examples of corruptive acts including sudden disappearances of prominent opposition actors or those who had criticized the government and the leadership of the country.³⁶

The Orange Revolution took place in Ukraine following the 2004 presidential elections which were claimed to have been violated by the government with excessive electoral fraud. Despite exit polls showing the real winner of the election runoff to be Viktor Yushchenko, another candidate, Viktor Yanukovich who was supported by Kuchma, was

³² Lucan A. Way, “Rapacious individualism and political competition in Ukraine, 1992-2004,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (2005): 191-193.

³³ Kubicek, 2001, 135.

³⁴ Puglisi, 2003, 100-111.

³⁵ More detailed information about the “Kuchmagate” scandal can be read here: Kubicek, 2001, 132. Zimmer and Haran, 2008, 551. Kuzio, 2005, 169.

³⁶ Kubicek, 2001, 132. Kuzio, 2005, 169, 186-187. Ellen Bos, “Das politische System der Ukraine,” in *Die politischen System Osteuropas*, 3rd ed., ed. Wolfgang Ismayr. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag Für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010): 576.

declared the winner. This resulted in massive popular demonstrations in Kyiv which led to a new atmosphere of political leadership in Ukraine.³⁷ But did the Orange Revolution lead to a more democratized political leadership in Ukraine?

The leaders of the Orange Revolution which later formed the Orange coalition in government consisted of Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko. The Ukrainian people were hopeful that corruption would finally be uprooted in Ukrainian politics since the “democratic” leaders of the Revolution promised a different political environment than had been during the Kuchma era. But what is ironic is that it looks like the population was mobilized by oligarchs themselves who had temporarily put aside their disputes and put on a “democratic front” for the time being in order to gain power. Yushchenko and Tymoshenko were actually both part of catch-all opposition movements and they had also been accused of corrupt acts many times during their political career. And even after what should have been a democratic breakthrough for the Ukrainian political system, the Orange coalition fell apart after a short time due to allegations of corruption. Ukraine thus witnessed a continuation of oligarchization of power instead of democratization of power.³⁸

2.3. Civil society

An active civil society is extremely important in countries going through a democratic transition. It is a crucial link between the private life and the public, provides a “check” on the powers of the state which is embodied in non state voluntary organizations where citizens are equipped with civic skills, such as how to protest and mobilize their fellow citizens. Civil society can be defined as a privately organized sphere of society, not connected to the state, where everyone has an equal chance to participate and where citizens join based on their own interests, desire or needs without seeking power. Sometimes though these citizens long for political influence, but they all unite in these organizations and fight for various matters which are important to them.³⁹

Ukrainians as other post-Soviet nations have had to build their civil society from scratch since the totalitarian Soviet regime didn’t allow for independent societal groups to form or work officially. Therefore, Ukrainian civil society was extremely weak in the 1990s with some changes following the election scandal which led to the Orange Revolution in

³⁷ Taras Kuzio, “The Opposition’s Road to Success,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, 2 (2005): 117-118.

³⁸ Paul Kubicek, 2009, 329-332.

³⁹ Marc Morjé Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 1, 11.

2004. There have been low levels of organizational membership of civil society groups; they have been small and highly dependent on external relations, such as foreign organizational and financial assistance.⁴⁰ Most of the challenges that Ukrainian leaders have had to face come from political opposition which are often former allies or democratic forces, not from active and influential civil society groups.⁴¹

Ukraine's civil society has been tired and defeated in times of mass corruption, unemployment and economic collapse in the Kravchuk and Kuchma regimes. The citizens felt helpless and powerless and did not feel like they could change anything. There have been limited signs of public debate, voluntary organizations and accountable governments. The possible causes for this according to Kubicek are that Ukraine is a weak state and has a weak national identity especially in the region where the majority is Russian-speaking, has a low standards of living, lack of freedom and independent organizations that do try to practice their civic skills are harassed by the state.⁴² Today, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society groups are relatively weak but have strengthened to a great extent since the Orange Revolution. The international community was surprised when a vibrant civil society emerged and hundreds of thousand people were mobilized to join opposition forces to throw the illegitimately voted president out of office. Following the Orange Revolution, civil society has become far more active especially with youth groups which are less intimidated by the state than before.⁴³

A cornerstone of the civil society is the freedom of the press where independent media is allowed to criticize the government freely without having the risk of being harassed by the state. Freedom House labeled the media in Ukraine "partly free" in its 2010 country report. It ranks number 108-109 out of 196 states, but the status can be applied to Ukraine in all of its transition period.⁴⁴ All of Ukraine's election campaigns have shown signs of electoral violations such as early voting and vote rigging. There has been discrimination against independent media whereas the state television usually has a very clear pro-incumbent bias. In its election reports, the OSCE always criticizes the media in Ukraine, both state and private media and usually concludes that the media has comprehensively failed to live up to its

⁴⁰ Way, 2004, 144, 155.

⁴¹ Way, 2005, 194-199.

⁴² Kubicek, 2001, 129-130.

⁴³ Kubicek, 2009, 337-338.

⁴⁴ Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2010: Broad Setbacks to Global Media Freedom," <http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pfs/371.pdf> (accessed July 25 2011).

obligations under electoral law to provide citizens with unbiased information about competing candidates.⁴⁵

Freedom House has in its latest report stated that attacks, threats and harassment against the media have continued after the Orange Revolution although serious attacks against journalists, such as the previously mentioned “Kuchmagate” are less common now. Corruption in the media thrives as political messages are hidden in the media as advertisements and businessmen and politicians still have a lot of “behind the scene” power since transparency of media ownership remains poor. After 2004 though, there has been more room for independent media but they are still subject to abuse from the state where Ukraine’s criminal justice system still fails to protect journalists from oligarchs, businessmen and criminal groups.⁴⁶

2.4. External actors

The external dimension of democratization is becoming more prominent in transition studies especially since the EU has claimed to be a democracy promoter to other regions. Due to its geographical situation Ukraine as well as the other countries of this study is under external influence from two great powers, both Russia and its western neighbors in the EU. These external actors have different influence but it seems that Russia has negative effects while the EU has positive effects on democratization in Ukraine, or at least, Russia seems to pose a serious challenge for European democracy promotion.

I will look into the extent the external influence of Russia and the EU has influenced democratization in Ukraine so far. External influence from the US will not be taken into consideration in this paper since the aim is to focus on Europe and the scope of this paper doesn’t allow for such a comprehensive approach. The EU can have crucial effects on democratization and Kubicek even claims that one of the most effective tools in persuading regimes to undergo democratic transition by changing their laws and institutions to the better is the prospect of joining the EU as was the case with certain Central European states.⁴⁷

The EU has been quite ambiguous towards Ukraine and its impact on Ukraine has so far been limited, because of EU concerns over future expansion and domestic factors in Ukraine. The EU has never offered Ukraine membership and the country has been grouped

⁴⁵ Kubicek, 2001, 124. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “Election Reports: Ukraine,” <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/ukraine> (accessed July 25 2011).

⁴⁶ Freedom House, 2010.

⁴⁷ Kubicek, 2009, 337-338.

with countries with no prospect of gaining membership. Ukraine, as the Newly Independent States got promises of unbinding partnership with the EU whereas the policy towards the Central and Eastern European countries was more of integration and later accession. The EU has nonetheless included Ukraine in its European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and an Action Plan has been developed under the ENP to promote political and economic cooperation between the EU and border countries such as Ukraine.⁴⁸ Today and after the Orange Revolution, the Action Plan has been upgraded and the EU has offered Ukraine to join a “deep free trade area”. The Orange Revolution was welcomed throughout the EU, but the EU didn’t respond so well to Ukraine’s statement of its ambition to join the European Union. So the EU has been reluctant to give any promises to the Ukraine where membership enjoys wide support.⁴⁹

Russia both has influence on Ukraine itself and also on the EU and its approach to democracy promotion in Ukraine. The phrase “Russia-first policy” was coined to describe the situation, where the original members of the EU are still careful in their relations to the former Soviet states because Russia, which is a powerful and important global actor, has had a special relationship with those countries for a very long time. Usually, the EU makes deals with Russia first and then negotiates with other post-Soviet states, making it appear afraid to offend Russia.⁵⁰ Russia uses the same strategy towards Ukraine as in Moldova and Belarus. Its foreign policy towards these states includes buying the countries off by offering political support and economic benefits such as loans and cheap energy, or punishing them by increasing gas and oil prices which increases their debts. Because Ukraine is indebted to Russia, the Russian government can use that to influence Ukraine in variable matters for example, it can demand that Ukraine repay some of its debt within a certain time period, or else they will have to face sanctions. This undermines the Ukrainian government’s ability to control the economy and thus can weaken its democratization process.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid, 336-337.

⁴⁹ Iryna Solonenko, “External democracy promotion in Ukraine: the role of the European Union,” *Democratization* 16, 4 (2009): 711-716.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 714-715.

⁵¹ Jakob Tolstrup, “Studying a negative external actor: Russia’s management of stability and instability in the ‘Near Abroad’,” *Democratization* 16, 5 (2009): 935-939.

2.5. Nation-building

In the transitology literature, the national question and the importance of nation-building for the post-Soviet countries has often been ignored. Transition scholars have claimed that democracies need integrated political communities and people within them who can unite around democratic reforms and form a political community. The political values which people share in a political community are absent in post-communist Ukraine because of the inherited legacies of the Soviet nationality policies and the regional and ethnic division of the country. People from different parts of the country were exposed to the Soviet nationality policies to a varying extent and today have a different national sentiment towards the independent Ukraine and the former Soviet Ukraine.⁵²

Ukrainians are 78% of the country's populations and 17% are ethnic Russians. There have been disputes as to whether Russians should be treated as a national minority or a second titular ethnic group. Elites in Ukraine have through the years agreed on the importance of a state language to strengthen the national identity of Ukrainians. The official language is Ukrainian and the Russian language has been removed from public life in western Ukraine, but in the East and South Russian is still widely spoken.⁵³ It is safe to say that national identification in Ukraine is rather weak. National identification refers to "the degree to which people in a nation-state identify themselves as members of the national community and feel positively toward it".⁵⁴ This has been a problem for the Ukrainian elite, to build up a nation, since there are two dominant groups which share different views on which features distinguish Ukrainian national identity. Shulman names these groups Eastern Slavics and Ethnic Ukrainians and claims that they have a different national identity where one group labels itself as Russian Ukrainian and the other as ethnic Ukrainians.⁵⁵

The latter group feels that the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian ethnicity should be dominant in the nation state of Ukraine and that Ukrainians as a titular group should hold a special status in the country. They claim that their relationship with Russia is that of a colonized and colonizer where Russians imposed the Russian language on them during the Soviet era. Because of the former oppression of Russians toward Ukrainians, ethnic Ukrainian

⁵² Kuzio, 2000, 145.

⁵³ Taras Kuzio, "The Nation-Building Project in Ukraine and Identity: Toward a Consensus," in *Dilemmas of state-led nation building in Ukraine*, ed. Taras Kuzio and Paul D'Anieri. (Westport: Praeger, 2002): 20-21.

⁵⁴ Stephen Shulman, "The Contours of Civic and Ethnic National Identification in Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, 1 (2004): 35.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 38.

culture and language should be favored and the nation state of Ukraine should be built around that.⁵⁶ Eastern Slavics maintain the view that the Ukrainian nation is founded on two ethnic groups, Ukrainians and Russians and both cultures and languages should be promoted since Russians have been a part of Ukraine for centuries, and have a special position in Ukrainian society rather than being just another national minority. Ukraine is in their view built up of two equally native ethnic groups which are very close in terms of culture, language and history.⁵⁷

Right now, the eastern part of the country and Eastern Slavics still look to Russia and long for the return of the Soviet era whereas the western part and ethnic Ukrainians look to the West and the EU and are longing for reforms.⁵⁸ Divergent views on these two groups' national identification have however not led to any conflicts and does not seem to strongly affect the democratization process. Neither has the relationship between Ukraine and the autonomous republic of Crimea, which has its borders within Ukrainian territory, been anything else but peaceful in the post-Soviet era.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Shulman, 2004, 39.

⁵⁸ Kuzio, 2005, 169-170.

⁵⁹ Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: The Post-Soviet Transition*. (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001): 193-194.

3. Belarus

3.1 *Political parties*

Parties have been described as the most important part of the democratic process. If we believe that statement, we will see that it makes perfect sense in the case of Belarus where there is neither democratic process nor strong parties that dominate the political scene or gain seats in parliamentary elections. The development of the political party system in Belarus experienced a sudden halt in 1996 when the president of the country dismissed the parliament and most of the main parties disappeared from the mainstream political party arena. Political parties still try to run for office in elections, but the opposition parties are weak and they have had to move to the civil society due to the lack of opportunities within the parliament itself where the members are usually handpicked by president Lukashenko.⁶⁰

Nationalist and anti-communist parties were the first prominent parties in the early years of the party system formation in Belarus, which took place in the late 1980s. During 1991 and 1992 many new parties emerged as alternatives to successor movements and some of them make up today's weak opposition. From 1992 to 1994, the main political parties were social and national-democrats and it looked like Belarus had a real potential to develop a stable party system. However, in 1995, many of the most popular parties showed extremely low results and independent deputies gained more support.⁶¹

What is arguably the cause of these results is that the electoral system is majoritarian and this has hindered the institutionalization of political parties. Also, the introduction of the presidency in 1992 ruined the potential to develop a stable party system, but the presidency was established to avoid political pluralism which was considered dangerous to democracy. The years after the 1996 dismissal of the parliament were characterized by continuing party decline and disintegration. Today, the majority of deputies are not members of political parties and the president doesn't represent any party.⁶² All evidence now point to the fact that the establishment of a strong presidency has cost Belarus the chance of developing a pluralistic political system with an effective party system.

⁶⁰ Elena A. Korosteleva, "Party System Development in Belarus, 1988-2001: Myths and Realities," in *Political Parties in Post-Soviet Space*, ed. Anatoly Kulik and Susanna Pshizova. (Westport: Praeger, 2005): 60-61.

⁶¹ Tarnauski, 2005, 45-46, 52.

⁶² Ibid, 53. Korosteleva, 2005, 63.

The 15 currently existing registered parties in Belarus have been described as factional with low party membership and a lack of party discipline. They are organized from the top down with weak linkage in society. Parties seem to care more about personal profits rather than the needs and wishes of the electorate, which results in public disbelief in parties. A clear ideology is usually absent which makes it hard for people to identify themselves with parties. Financial and organizational capacity is often limited because of the president's various restrictions regarding political and civil society movements. Therefore, most political parties have a very limited impact on policy-making in the country, even though they try in each election to run for office either in parliamentary or presidential elections with poor results and with almost no prospect of winning and gaining power.⁶³

3.2. Political leadership

In the first and only free and fair presidential elections in 1994 after Belarus gained independence, a president was elected who had claimed he would eradicate corruption from Belarusian political life. Before this, no dominating elite had taken power in the country; there were neither powerful business elite nor a president who could exploit political power. Belarus was the last post-Soviet republic to introduce the position of the president and up until then, there had been a relatively pluralistic political scene, where no single actor had monopolized the power.

In 1994, Alexander Lukashenko changed this situation and marked a new beginning in Belarusian political life which has been characterized by oppression, corruption and authoritarian rule.⁶⁴ He has gained personal control over the entire state administration, the media and a huge part of the economy. Belarus has a few institutional bodies that are considered "independent", but there is an executive Cabinet of Ministers including a prime minister and a bicameral parliament as well as a Constitutional Court. However, these actors do not carry any real power compared to the power of the president. The "independence" of these institutions is restricted because the president appoints or approves candidates who have a seat in them.⁶⁵

Shortly after Lukashenko was voted president, he began to show signs of authoritarian tendencies. He called a referendum in 1996 when he saw signs of a more independent

⁶³ Korosteleva, 2005, 68-74.

⁶⁴ Vitali Silitski, "Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus," *Journal of Democracy* 16, 4 (2005): 85-86.

⁶⁵ Eke and Kuzio, 2000, 523.

parliament and Constitutional Court, which would enhance his powers versus the parliament and extend his term in office. The voting was marked by gross electoral violations which would be a sign of continuing electoral abuse by the government and constant unfree and unfair elections in the years to come followed by arrests of opposition leaders and few opportunities for them to gain power. Just a few days after the elections, the parliament was shut down and new deputies began their terms. These included hand-picked members of the president's closest allies and supporters. Belarusian scholar and a pronounced critic of the Belarusian government, Vitali Silitski states that "with the 1996 referendum, the institutionalization of a personalist authoritarian rule in Belarus was completed."⁶⁶

Lukashenko's regime is characterized by sultanistic characteristics where the political scene has become polarized around the personal ambition of one man. He was initially elected on a populist base since he did not represent any party. Since then, his policies have been inconsistent and his ideology is to do what benefits him the most. The president's personality plays an overwhelming role; he uses symbolic politics to manipulate the electorate by hanging up photographs of himself in public places around the country and presents himself as a family man.⁶⁷ Arrest, harassment and disappearance of opposition leaders have been prominent in Lukashenko's regime. Opponents are publicly said to be a danger to the people and are often portrayed as terrorists or Nazis.⁶⁸

Lukashenko has abolished rule of law and there is no real institutionalization, resulting in the absence of checks and balances where the president is never held accountable for his policies or actions.⁶⁹ Corruption thrives because there is no clear line between the state and the president, Lukashenko considers the state's resources to be his own and he is the main employer in the country. Around 80% of the population relies on a salary or subsidies from the state so the majority of the labor market is state owned. This can have the effect that people become beholden to the president and feel bound to support him.⁷⁰ But is that the case in Belarus? Does the president really enjoy wide support or is the support derived through political repression?

⁶⁶ Silitski, 2005, 87-88.

⁶⁷ Eke and Kuzio, 2000, 530-532.

⁶⁸ Silitski, 2005, 93.

⁶⁹ Eke and Kuzio, 2000, 530-531.

⁷⁰ Ustina Markus, "Belarus," in *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics*, ed. Donnacha Beachain and Adel Polese. (London: Routledge, 2010): 131. Silitski, 2005, 88-93.

The percentage of voters that supposedly vote for Lukashenko in presidential elections has been 75-85% since he was first elected in 1994, according to official Belarusian election outcome data. However scholars, as well as the international community have questioned these numbers and the number closer to reality is thought to be around 45-55%.⁷¹ So almost half of Belarus' electorate genuinely supports Lukashenko, or thinks he is the better choice of a few bad candidates. The number of people voting for an undemocratic president still seems high in a European country in the 21st century. What could arguably be the reason is that Belarus suffered an economic downturn in the years following the breakup of the Soviet Union, just as most of the former Soviet republics. But what is different is that Belarus held its first presidential elections much later than the other countries and by 1994, the economic crisis had deepened and was already having widespread effects on a large part of the Belarusian population.⁷²

When people voted for Lukashenko in the first elections, there was increasing inflation, unemployment rates were rising and savings were being devalued. Where the economy is suffering and the people as well, there is a tendency to vote on the basis of economic security and stable living standards and that is what Belarusian voters did. They continue to do so because Lukashenko has been relatively successful in fighting the economic crisis and raising living standards and the Belarusian people seem to be considerably happy with their economy.⁷³ As previously mentioned, the majority of the Belarusian people rely on the state for their income and many seem satisfied because their salaries and pensions are paid on time, and even though they are not high, the economy is quite stable with a very low unemployment rate and the inflation has been overcome. Lukashenko is especially popular with older voters in rural areas who long for the Soviet system which stood for socialist values and a stable economy.⁷⁴

⁷¹ David Marples, "Color revolutions: The Belarus case," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29 (2006): 361. Silitski, 2005, 85. Markus, 2010, 131.

⁷² Eke and Kuzio, 2000, 538.

⁷³ David Marples, "Outpost of tyranny? The failure of democratization in Belarus," *Democratization* 16, 4 (2009): 763-764.

⁷⁴ Marples, 2006, 360-361.

3.3. *Civil Society*

Belarusian civil society is rather weak, mostly due to oppression and restrictions set forward by the government. Due to the lack of chances for political opposition parties to gain power in political life, the civil society has become highly politicized since it's the only arena in which opposition actors can make their voices heard. A few years after the controversial referendum of 1996 small and powerless, independent civil society groups existed. Young people were domestically mobilized and internationally supported to join youth movements and they actively organized protests against the Lukashenko regime.⁷⁵ By the 2001 elections, NGOs had developed and started showing signs of a capability to mobilize people with nation-wide campaigns.

The Lukashenko regime wanted to prevent the rise of these groups and in 2003-2004, one hundreds NGOs were closed down. NGOs soon had to face various new rules and restrictions and foreign intervention or financial assistance was prohibited. There is constant supervision by the state and a threat of suspension.⁷⁶ With that comes the risk of participating in NGOs, but youth group and NGO members have been fined large amounts of money, sometimes what constitutes a year's salary for the average family.⁷⁷ They have been physically beaten, arrested and sentenced to prison since the country's security force has been willing to use force against critics and demonstrators. There have been threats of dismissal from university or employment if people openly criticize the government or engage in protests. Due to these repressive methods it has been hard to mobilize young people to protest on a mass level and convince them to join independent civil society groups.⁷⁸

Restrictions on the country's media are also prominent but the state press and state TV monopolize the media with positive and supportive messages about the president which leaves little room for opposition leaders or NGOs to present their views. Independent mass media experience similar forms of repressive acts from the government as civil society groups. During each electoral campaign, the distribution of air time for the president and opposition leaders is extremely uneven and opposition newspapers are rarely allowed to be printed and web pages are shut down.⁷⁹ There is only one state-owned internet-provider and

⁷⁵ Astrid Sahm, "Civil society and mass media in Belarus," *Back from the cold? The EU and Belarus in 2009*, ed. Sabine Fischer. (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2009): 50-51.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Silitski, 2005, 91.

⁷⁸ Markus, 2010, 121-124. Marples, 2006, 359-360.

⁷⁹ Marples, 2006, 358. Sahm, 2009, 51.

the KGB monitors websites and blogs of young internet users who express negative views of the president. Cyber-attacks on websites criticizing the state have taken place as well.⁸⁰ Freedom House describes the media in Belarus as highly restricted in their latest country report concerning freedom of the press. They give Belarus the status of “not free” and the rank of 189-190 out of 194 countries. Therefore Belarus is grouped with the ten worst rated countries in the world which Freedom House describes as having barely operating independent media and a limited public access to unbiased information.⁸¹

3.4. External actors

Belarus may not be completely isolated from the international community, but it has been described as a quasi-pariah state. It means that Belarus has some, but not all the features of a pariah state, meaning a state which is considered not to be in line with international norms of behavior. Russia has been Belarus’ closest foreign ally. Due to internal domestic political circumstances of Belarus, the EU has often excluded the country from various organizations and deals that have been made with other East European countries and former Soviet republics.⁸² So the relationship of Belarus with these two actors is very different. The EU constantly criticizes the Belarusian government for fraudulent elections or referendums while Russia continues to recognize every election that Belarus holds as free and fair.

Russia needs the support from Belarus for its foreign policy goals and consequently Russia repays the favor with economic and political support. Russia provides good loans and power carriers at subsidized prices which makes Russia Belarus’ most important trading partner and scholars have stated that Belarusian economy could not survive without Russia. Today, Belarus is in big debt to Russia and Russia could always use its position as creditor to manipulate Belarus.⁸³

As soon as Lukashenko came to power, he immediately turned to Russia and established a special relationship with a joint security policy. Through the years, Lukashenko has proposed various integration initiatives with Russia, which have not all been initiated

⁸⁰ Markus, 2010, 126.

⁸¹ Freedom House, 2010.

⁸² Belarus Task Force, “A European Alternative for Belarus,” International Centre for Democratic Transition, 2008, http://www.icdt.hu/admin/download/a220ICDT_belarustaskforce.pdf (accessed: August 12 2011), 5.

⁸³ Marples, 2009, 765-766. Grzegorz Gromadzki, “Belarusian foreign policy – change or continuity?” in *Back from the cold? The EU and Belarus in 2009*, ed. Sabine Fischer. (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2009): 96.

although in the 1995 referendum, the Belarusian people agreed to a closer economic integration with Russia.⁸⁴ The close and benign relationship between Belarus and Russia does nonetheless seem to be faltering. Both the Russian proposal of incorporating Belarus into Russia which will be examined further in the next chapter and the radical price increases on Russia's energy exports to Belarus resulted in a turning point for Russia–Belarus relations where the president decided to distance Belarus from Russia and rely more on the sovereign Belarus and even the EU, instead of Russia.⁸⁵

In the beginning of Lukashenko's first term as president, when he sought deeper integration with Russia, he depicted the West (EU, the US and NATO) as a danger to the Belarusian state and claimed that western actors were trying to undermine the good relationship between Belarus and Russia. EU relations with Belarus have been fragile with Lukashenko in power. In the aftermath of the flawed 1996 referendum, the EU decided upon a number of sanctions against Belarus in the form of a travel ban on leading government figures and a freeze on Belarusian accounts in the EU area.⁸⁶ The EU has attempted to promote democratic rule in Belarus, for example when OSCE tried to unite opposition forces around one leader to face Lukashenko in the presidential elections in 2001. Their candidate received around 15% but the act did not lead to a more democratic political environment since Lukashenko won the elections.⁸⁷

Belarus has never sought any support from the EU and the government has always disliked their intervention in Belarusian domestic political affairs. But in recent years, there have been changes in Belarus' attitude towards the EU and vice versa. Belarus has strengthened its relations with neighboring countries which are part of the EU, especially after the enlargement of the EU in 2004.⁸⁸ Even though Belarus has not been invited to join the European Neighborhood Policy, the country was accepted into the Eastern Partnership of the EU in 2009 after some minimal changes that the Belarusian government made towards a more democratized political scene.⁸⁹ It seems that due to worsening relations with Russia, Belarus is today pursuing a closer relationship with the EU, but it's only on Belarus' terms and it is

⁸⁴ Markus, 2010, 120. Marples, 2009, 758.

⁸⁵ Belrus Task Force, 2008.

⁸⁶ Marples, 2006, 363. Gromadzki, 2009, 96-97.

⁸⁷ Marples, 2009, 760.

⁸⁸ Gromadzki, 2009, 97.

⁸⁹ Marples, 2009, 760-766.

arguably a balancing act because Belarus' leaders have realized that they need other allies since they can no longer only rely on Russia.⁹⁰

3.5 Nation-building

The nation-building process in Belarus has been quite contradictory since the country gained independence where neither the majority of the population nor the ruling Belarusian Soviet elite especially sought it. Nation-building in Belarus is considered a difficult task, public support for it is low and the government has had to build a national identity from scratch since Belarus did not inherit it from the Soviet Union.⁹¹

Belarusian people relate to a large extent to the former Soviet Union where Belarus is considered one of the most Russified of the former Soviet republics. The country is ethnically and regionally diverse and ethnic issues play a big role in building a nation. In the western and central part of the country a majority of the people consider themselves Belarusian and there is better preservation of Belarusian tradition and language. Ethnic Belarusians are around 78% with 13% considering themselves to be Russian. They mostly live in the East and have a more "Sovietized" national identification.⁹²

It is interesting to follow the development of the nation-building task in the hands of president Lukashenko, because in the end, all evidence shows that all the nation-building policies he carried out were only to insure that he remained in power and gained popular support. Shortly after Lukashenko was elected president, it looked like he was carrying out reverse nation-building and a famous Belarusian writer wrote that Lukashenko was on a mission to destroy Belarusian national sentiment, language and culture.⁹³ Many of the anti-Belarusian acts that the president put forward did not provoke dissatisfaction with the majority of Belarusians.

If we begin to look at the language issue, Lukashenko has mocked his own language publicly, closed down Belarusian language schools and made the Russian language equal to Belarusian language as the official state language. Even though a majority of Belarusians consider their native language to be Belarusian, only 10% prefer to use it in their daily communications and 65% hold a disrespectful view of their own language, according to

⁹⁰ Gromadzki, 2009, 102. Belarus Task Force, 2008, 6.

⁹¹ Eke and Kuzio, 2000, 526, 530, 542.

⁹² Ibid, 530-533.

⁹³ Ibid, 526.

recent surveys.⁹⁴ National symbols including the country's flag were replaced with the old Soviet Belarusian ones and the people did not protest, nor did they protest when the president moved the Belarusian national day to the date when Minsk was liberated from German occupation in 1944 instead of the date when Belarus declared sovereignty in 1990.⁹⁵

Around 2000 to 2002, the existing nation-building policies of Lukashenko suddenly started to change drastically and the reason was an integration proposal made by Russian president Vladimir Putin. As already mentioned, Belarus has always had a close relationship with Russia, but in post-Soviet time it has mainly been economic. In the beginning of a new century, Russia wanted to broaden its power and proposed that Belarus become incorporated into Russia. During negotiations with Russia, Lukashenko soon discovered that incorporation into Russia would mean a great loss of power for himself as the country's main leader.⁹⁶ This led to a complete reversal of Lukashenko's nation-building policies where the new policies included a strong emphasis on Belarusian sovereignty and a defense of the country's national symbols and attributes.

Lukashenko started to use nationalistic rhetoric in his speeches to the public, Soviet national symbols were again replaced with Belarusian ones and they were widely exposed to the Belarusian people in public places.⁹⁷ However, the Soviet sentiment which is well integrated into Belarusian society cannot be washed away so easily. A few Belarusians have developed a strong sense of being a "pure" Belarusian culturally or politically. A national identification with the Soviet Republic of Belarus can hinder regime reforms when a big part of the population is still nostalgic for the past.⁹⁸ Reforms do not seem to be what is on Lukashenko's mind when he tries to unite the people around Belarusian independence, but a consolidation of his own powers.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 525-526.

⁹⁵ Eke and Kuzio, 2000, 527, 536. Marples, 2006, 354. Markus, 2010, 120.

⁹⁶ Leshchenko, 2008, 1421.

⁹⁷ Gromadzki, 2009, 95.

⁹⁸ Taras Kuzio, "National Identity and Democratic Transition in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Belarus: A Theoretical and Comparative Perspective," *East European Perspectives* 4, 15 (2002). http://www.taraskuzio.net/Economic%20Transition_files/economics-perspective.pdf (accessed August 11 2011).

4. Moldova

4.1. Political parties

Moldova's party system has been described as possibly having the most stable party system of all other post-Soviet republics, excluding the Baltic states. Regardless of this "title", most scholars claim that this is a comparison of a bad party system and other even worse party systems. Even though the political party system was highly pluralistic in Moldova up until 2001, the main parties were weak, fragmented and badly organized. Moldova had no real previous experience of democracy, so shortly after the country gained independence the government adopted a law on political parties which led to the development of a multiparty system. The multiparty system was able to develop quickly because in Moldova, there is a completely proportional electoral system. The newly formed parties however lacked organizational skills, tradition and history coupled with an inconsistent ideology.⁹⁹

Moldovan party discourse was characterized by nationalistic arguments where parties were split across ethnic lines. The Moldovan people were already tired of the Communists before the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, but a year before, the Moldovan Popular Front had been voted into power. The party was composed of ethnic Moldovan nationalists who wanted to strengthen the Moldovan national identity and reunite with Romania which sparked criticism and protests from other national minorities in the country. The Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) was banned in 1991 and the Popular Front stayed in power until their policy of reunification with Romania lost support and a more pro-independence party took power.¹⁰⁰ More parties emerged in the 1990s which developed into more institutionalized parties. The left to right spectrum was marked by nationalistic claims. The right wing supported the incorporation of Moldova into Romania, the left wing supported the reconstruction of the Soviet Moldovan state with close relations to Russia and the center parties fought for an independent Moldova.¹⁰¹

Even though Moldova had a pluralistic political environment where different political parties fought for power in each elections in the 1990s, party defections contributed to a situation where political parties lacked real power within the parliament. There was usually a

⁹⁹ Tarnauski, 2005, 46, 52. Lucan A. Way, "Weak States and Pluralism: The Case of Moldova," *East European Politics and Societies* 17, 3 (2003): 461-462.

¹⁰⁰ Steven Roper, "From Semi-Presidentialism to Parliamentarism: Regime Change and Presidential Power in Moldova," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, 1 (2008): 114-116.

¹⁰¹ Valeriu Mosneaga, "Parties and Party System in Moldova, 1990-2002," in *Political Parties in Post-Soviet Space*, ed. Anatoly Kulik and Susanna Pshizova. (Westport: Praeger, 2005): 77-78.

considerable divergence between the parties' official political programs and their real political practice. Personal conflicts between leaders resulted in internal splits and the inability of parties to act on important issues which had to be taken care of in parliament.¹⁰² The party system in Moldova changed as the Communist came back to power after having been re-legalized in 1994 and entered parliament as a marginalized force in 1998.

The parties that were formed in the beginning of the 1990s started to lose their influence and in 2001, Moldova became the first former Communist republic in the post-Soviet world to democratically elect an unreformed Communist party to power.¹⁰³ The party scene changed since the PCRM was very different from the other parties that have been described as weak and unorganized. The PCRM was far from weak; it was tightly organized with loyal and disciplined members. The main problem was that the Communists were inexperienced in running a democratic government.¹⁰⁴

Since the election in 2001, the PCRM has been a controversial actor and right from the beginning there were signs of authoritarian tendencies.¹⁰⁵ They temporarily banned a party from the political scene for protesting laws proposed by the Communists. Censorship in the state media, efforts to fire the directors of the state television and radio along with attempts to shut down the weekly newspaper published by the opposition are all examples of a creeping authoritarianism in Moldova's Communist-controlled government.¹⁰⁶ Today, the party system of Moldova, after a few years of an undemocratic one-party rule, has political competition again. The PCRM finally has some real contenders that have threatened their seats in parliament and their presidential post in the past three years. In the latter parliamentary elections in the year of 2009, the PCRM was defeated and more reform-minded parties came to power in a coalition.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Roper, 2008, 115. Mosneaga, 2005, 77.

¹⁰³ Tarnauski, 2005, 46. Way, 2002, 130.

¹⁰⁴ Way, 2002, 135. Mosneaga, 2005, 91.

¹⁰⁵ Luke March, "From Moldovanism to Europeanization? Moldova's Communists and Nation Building," *Nationalities Papers* 35, 4 (2007): 601.

¹⁰⁶ Way, 2003, 456-457. Way, 2002, 130.

¹⁰⁷ BBC News, "Moldova Communists lose majority," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8173649.stm> (accessed August 19 2011).

4.2. Political leadership

The political leadership has commonly been in the hands of the presidents of the country, despite the fact that Moldova is a parliamentary regime. It started off with a presidential system, moved later to a semi-presidentialism and in 2000 the country became a parliamentary regime.¹⁰⁸ Regardless of the different roles of the president laid out by the three political systems, Moldova's presidents have been ambitious in exploring their presidential authority. All of Moldova's previous presidents were members of the former Soviet Moldovan Communist elite, but two of them won office without any ties to the former Communist party. That did not result in a very democratic rule due to lack of experience of democratic governance by the Soviet Communists.¹⁰⁹

Mircea Snegur was elected president in 1990, first representing the Moldovan Popular Front but his opposition to an immediate reunification with Romania, which was one of the top priorities of the Popular Front, led to a split with the party. Snegur was then elected as an independent candidate in the first presidential elections of the independent Moldova which took place in 1991.¹¹⁰ Even though Snegur did not seek reunification with Romania, he held a pro-Romanian stance, different from the next president, Petru Lucinschi who advocated closer ties with Russia. Lucinschi was elected president in 1995, also as an independent candidate which led to similar difficulties as experienced by Snegur; the difficulties of gaining more presidential power over the parliament and legislature.¹¹¹

Even though these two presidents who governed in the 1990s had a generous amount of power, including a veto over the legislature and the power to appoint the prime minister, they were unable to impose any kind of order.¹¹² The pluralism of power in Moldova's political system made it hard for presidents Snegur and Lucinschi to control the parliament and even their own allies. The legislature has been powerful enough to consistently constrain presidential authority. The presidents became isolated and had difficulties practicing their authoritarian means because they failed to strengthen the presidency.¹¹³

While Moldova had a semi-presidential system, the head of parliament and prime minister were given increased power and Lucinschi, the president at that time often had

¹⁰⁸ Roper, 2008, 114.

¹⁰⁹ Way, 2003, 458.

¹¹⁰ Roper, 2008, 116.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 119.

¹¹² Roper, 2008 123. Way, 2003, 474.

¹¹³ Way, 2003, 474-475.

confrontations with parliament due to his desire to establish a presidential regime where he could have the final say over the parliament.¹¹⁴ It is now known that Vladimir Voronin, the Communist president who ruled under a parliamentary system which is considered to be the most democratic form of government, practiced more authoritarian acts than the previous presidents who were supposed to have more powers according to the relevant political system. Lucan A. Way states that “the establishment of a parliamentary system has not promoted democratic development in Moldova. If anything, the opposite has been the case.”¹¹⁵

Voronin, as the leader of the only party in control, started from the beginning attempts to expand his control. He ordered the replacement of numerous judges in the judiciary with his loyal supporters. His own party members were put in high positions in the state media and he reinstated the old Soviet territorial administration in local government.¹¹⁶ Corruption was far from obscure in Voronin’s government where public officials were bribed by businessmen, and Transparency International stated that corruption was the second worst problem in Moldova after poverty.¹¹⁷

In Moldova, the president is elected by the parliament. Due to the fact that the PCRM did not win enough seats to get Voronin elected president in 2009, he resigned. A simple majority is enough for the election of a new government but 61 deputies out of 101 are needed to elect a president.¹¹⁸ Since 2009, there has been a presidential crisis in Moldova where the parliament has been unable to elect a president and three members of parliament have held the position of acting president. Different measures have been tried but in 2010, 87% of voters said “yes” to a referendum question which asked if the president should be elected directly by the people. However, the legal threshold for a valid vote was not reached so Moldova continues to be without clear political leadership.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Ryan Kennedy, “Moldova,” in *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics*, ed. Donnacha Beachain and Adel Polese. (London: Routledge, 2010): 64.

¹¹⁵ Way, 2002, 130.

¹¹⁶ Paul D. Quinlan, “Back to the Future: An Overview of Moldova under Voronin,” *Demokratizatsiya* 12, 4 (2004): 487.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 493.

¹¹⁸ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Voronin To Resign As Acting Moldovan President,” http://www.rferl.org/content/Acting_Moldovan_President_Voronin_Reportedly_Resigns/1812942.html (accessed August 18 2011)

¹¹⁹ The Economist, “A Moldovan fiasco,”

http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2010/09/moldovas_constitution

4.3. Civil Society

Civil society groups began to develop under the former Soviet policy of *glasnost* where liberalization and openness were the main objectives. In the beginning, most of these groups were concerned with the issue of Moldova's national language which was a controversial matter in the beginning of the 1990s.¹²⁰ Civil society in Moldova began to develop more effectively after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Like most of the former Soviet Republics, civil society is weak, where NGOs, albeit numerous, continue to be small and unable to survive without western funding.¹²¹

The public has largely been hesitant to join independent organizations because of the lack of trust of other citizens and the lack of faith in democratic institutions.¹²² However, this is not to say that Moldovan society has always been immobilized and reluctant to go on to the streets and protest. In the earlier parliamentary elections of 2009, protesters gathered on the streets and demanded that the Communists stepped down from office.¹²³ Lucan A. Way though states that the people are not really mobilized to protest by NGOs and other civil society groups, it is more the case that popular political action usually is sparked by spontaneous acts. Protests are generally not properly organized and they are usually short-lived. What Way also claims is that even though protests have been successful, NGOs are unable to provide checks and balances on the state on a regular basis.¹²⁴

Both state-owned and independent media in Moldova were relatively free during the 1990s despite laws in place that limit freedom of expression. The political elite were nonetheless hesitant to use these laws. The media was often openly critical of the government and even state-owned television and radio provided mostly unbiased coverage.¹²⁵ The situation drastically changed after the PCRM came to power in 2001. The top executives of the state radio were fired and during elections, the media focused on the Communists and president Voronin.¹²⁶ Efforts to introduce a complete censorship on national television

¹²⁰ Mosneaga, 2005, 76.

¹²¹ Way, 2002, 129.

¹²² Gabriel Badescu, Paul Sum and Eric M. Uslaner, "Civil Society Development and Democratic Values in Romania and Moldova," *East European Politics & Societies* 18, 2 (2004): 316.

¹²³ Guardian, "Anti-communist protesters storm Moldova parliament after election,"

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/07/moldova-protests-chisinau> (accessed August 19 2011).

¹²⁴ Way, 2002, 129.

¹²⁵ Way, 2003, 456, 466. Kennedy, 2010, 65.

¹²⁶ Kennedy, 2010, 65, 67.

however failed because media employees went on a strike to protest.¹²⁷ Authoritarian attempts continue to take place in the media and today, Freedom House gives Moldova's media the status of "not free". The country ranks number 144-145 out of 192 countries in the 2010 chart describing the freedom of the media in the world. In the report from Freedom House, press freedom in Moldova is described as continuously declining under Communist rule where president Voronin holds tight control over the press. In recent elections, independent media faced restrictions and journalists were harassed when they publicly criticized the Communists. Foreign media had limited access to the country and numerous journalists were denied a visa around election time.¹²⁸

4.4. External actors

Moldova has been considered a weak state which is highly exposed to external influence, especially due to the fact that within the territory of Moldova, there are two autonomous regions of Transnistria and Gagauzia where international mediation has taken place, but the case of the secession regions will be examined further in the next chapter.¹²⁹ Relations between Moldova and its two most powerful neighboring external actors, EU and Russia have been divergent through different time periods. Moldova was quite Russia-orientated up until just a few years ago, but that didn't hinder Moldova's relations with the EU through neighboring programs.

Moldova's relations with their most influential external actor, Russia, went through significant changes after the PCRM suddenly changed their foreign vision in 2005. But what happened? During the 1990s, relations between the two countries were typical of those between former Soviet countries and Russia. Moldova is economically dependent on Russia, which provides loans and imports a large amount of Moldovan goods. Moldova also relies on Russia for oil and gas for its energy consumption.¹³⁰ But the relationship between the two

¹²⁷ Mosneaga, 2005, 93.

¹²⁸ Freedom House, 2010.

¹²⁹ Luke March and Graeme P. Herd, "Moldova Between Europe and Russia: Inoculating Against the Colored Contagion?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 22, 4 (2006): 362.

¹³⁰ Bertelsmann Transformation Index, "BTI 2010 Moldova Country Report," <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/en/bti/country-reports/laendergutachten/cis-and-mongolia/moldova/> (accessed August 20 2011).

countries has never been that of two equal actors. Russia has used its “peacekeeping” forces¹³¹ in the Transnistria region, whose citizens claim independence of the region, but the Moldovan government does not accept the claim.¹³²

In 2001, the PCRM, which had just been voted into power, looked more to the East than to the West for its foreign relations. In the party’s manifesto there was no European cooperation statement, however there was a statement to join the Russia-Belarus Union.¹³³ Two recent turning points have resulted in a “cooling off” in Moldova-Russia relations and a more EU-oriented view. In 2003, Russia proposed a deal called the Kozak Memorandum which was supposed to solve the situation in Transnistria. Moldova would be a unified state but Transnistrian deputies in parliament would have a disproportional say over federal matters giving Transnistria extraordinary blocking powers. Moldovan president Voronin decided to reject the Memorandum in 2005, which was a huge embarrassment for Russia.¹³⁴ Russia fought back by placing a ban on the import of Moldovan wine which damaged the Moldovan wine industry to a large extent.¹³⁵ In the next elections, the Russian government openly supported the opposition parties and criticized the Communists who in turn campaigned with EU integration as a key aim.¹³⁶

EU and Moldova relations have been quite positive throughout the country’s independence time, even though neither side has put a huge focus on each other, at least until 2005, when the PCRM suddenly turned towards the EU because of worsening relations with Russia. Moldova was among the first former Soviet republics to join the Council of Europe and the Council has helped mediate an end to social protests.¹³⁷ The EU included Moldova in its European Neighborhood Policy in 2003 and shortly after, a EU-Moldova Action Plan was formulated.¹³⁸ The EU has not been directly involved in solving the Transnistrian conflict but

¹³¹ Russia uses this word as they claim that they are only withholding peace in secessionist regions like Transnistria, however it can be debated if those forces are really “peacekeepers” or just regular armed forces, thus better described as armies.

¹³² Tolstrup, 2009, 937.

¹³³ March, 2007, 605.

¹³⁴ Kennedy, 2010, 74-75. Tolstrup, 2009, 936.

¹³⁵ Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 2010.

¹³⁶ Tolstrup, 2009, 936. March, 2007, 613.

¹³⁷ Way, 2003, 462. March, 2007, 616.

¹³⁸ Kennedy, 2010, 75.

the EU aims include helping Moldova strengthen its own capacity to control the region.¹³⁹ Today, Moldova's aim is to "Europeanize", especially with today's non-Communist government, named "Alliance for European Integration" whose top priority is to join the EU.¹⁴⁰ A closer cooperation with the EU is highly supported in the poor country of Moldova but 77% of respondents in a Gallup survey in 2005 supported European integration.¹⁴¹ In a more recent survey from 2010, Moldova is said to be the most EU-friendly Eastern country where the majority wants to strengthen the country's relations with the EU rather than Russia and eventually gain EU membership.¹⁴²

4.5. Nation-building

Nation-building has been a difficult task for Moldova's leaders due to ethnic divisions which has led to outbreaks of conflicts, followed by its special relationship with both Romania and Russia. A powerful ethnic factor is present in Moldova and has been one of the contributing factors to the state's weakness and the fragmentation of elites. Different parties want different things and the most salient and controversial factor that differentiates parties in Moldova has been the ethnic factor. In the beginning of party formation in Moldova party politics revolved around ethnic issues such as national minority rights, language use and even the question whether Moldova should be independent or not.¹⁴³ Following Moldova's independence, the country split into three groups where people defined themselves as one of the following; nationalists who support unification with Romania, centrists who seek to preserve Moldovan independence or leftists whose greatest desire is to strengthen Moldova's ties to Russia.¹⁴⁴

The language issue was the main factor leading to worsening relations between ethnic groups in Moldova. New language laws were proposed in 1989 and later adopted, where Moldovan was to be the official language of the country whereas Russian was to become the official language of interethnic communication. Ethnic Moldovans were not satisfied with the

¹³⁹ Nicu Popescu, "The EU in Moldova – Settling conflicts in the neighbourhood," Occasional Paper n.60 – *EU Institute for Security Studies*, 2005.

http://www.operationspaix.net/IMG/pdf/THE_EU_in_Moldova-2.pdf (accessed August 20 2011).

¹⁴⁰ George Dura, "On track. Moldova wants EU integration, but needs to do its homework first," *Commentary - Centre for European Policy Studies*, 2009.

¹⁴¹ March, 2007, 617.

¹⁴² EurActiv, "Moldova most EU-friendly Eastern country, survey reveals,"

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/east-mediterranean/moldova-most-EU-friendly-eastern-country-survey-reveals-news-495197> (accessed August 21 2011).

¹⁴³ Mosneaga, 2005, 87.

¹⁴⁴ Way, 2002, 137.

laws, neither were the ethnic Russians and other Russian-speaking minority groups. The dissatisfaction led to a protest of 25 thousand Moldovans and an even more dramatic event carried out by minority groups in the regions of Gagauzia and Transnistria. Russians and Ukrainians in the region of Transnistria went on a strike to protest the designated language laws and shortly after, the region declared its autonomy from Moldova, elected its own parliament and formed a militia. Similar events took place in the Turkish-speaking region of Gagauzia and the Gagauz and Bulgarians who reside there also called for secession from Moldova and the creation of an autonomous republic.¹⁴⁵

The secession demands didn't come by peacefully in Transnistria, whereas the situation in Gagauzia has always been more easily dealt with. Armed conflict took place around the borders of Transnistria which led to a full-scale civil war between Transnistrian forces supported by a Russian army against Moldovan forces. A cease-fire agreement was reached in the summer of 1992 but no final resolution of the conflict was achieved. Transnistria remains a *de facto* separate and independent state from Moldova, unrecognized by the international community.¹⁴⁶ The language issue was not settled until 2005 when the Moldovan parliament granted Transnistria the right to have Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian as official languages.¹⁴⁷

Since the regions' declaration of autonomy, Moldova has successfully resolved all its major regional conflicts with Gagauzia but Transnistria continues to pose a problem to Moldova. The ongoing disputes and conflicts with the unsatisfied government of Transnistria makes it harder for Moldovan elite to consolidate their nation-building and external policies which are moving more and more towards the West, a situation that the Transnistrian elite does not approve of. It is likely that the Transnistrian disputes will make it harder for Moldova to democratize, since unification around reforms is unlikely to take place between the Moldovan and Transnistrian government.

¹⁴⁵ Stephen K. Batalden and Sandra L. Batalden, *The Newly Independent States of Eurasia – Handbook of Former Soviet Republics*. (Pheonix: The Oryx Press, 1993), 59-62.

¹⁴⁶ Way, 2002, 128-129.

¹⁴⁷ March, 2007, 614.

5. Results

In this thesis, I set out to find out why the former Soviet countries of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova failed to democratize in the twenty years since the Soviet Union collapsed and one-party Communist rule was put to an end. In order to find the flaws in the political systems of these countries, many aspects needed to be taken into consideration. These countries had no or very limited experience with democracy or being independent and democratic institutions needed to be built from scratch. Neither were they experienced in mobilizing the civil society to provide “checks and balances” on those new democratic institutions. The newly independent states didn’t before have to deal with external actors or carry out nation-building measure; those matters had all been in the hands of the centralized government of the Soviet Union.

In the process of democratization, many factors need to be taken into consideration if we want to be able to understand what it is that contributes to either the success or the failure of a democratic transition. The five factors that I chose for this thesis are arguably the most contributing factors to a lack of democratization in the case of these three countries. Political parties, political leadership, civil society, external actors and nation-building are all variables that I maintain have influenced the regime change in Ukraine, Belarus and Ukraine. I have already examined closely the five factors for each country, but in order to develop clear conclusions on why democratization has failed, it is necessary to analyze the influence that every one of these factors has had on the democratization process and see which ones have contributed most to the failure of democratic transition in each country.

5.1. Ukraine

The civil society in Ukraine was weak during the 1990s with most independent organizations being small and badly organized. However, civil society was quite active in the western part of the country where people were more reform-minded and supported opposition groups. This was evident as the Orange Revolution broke out in 2004, when a mass protest of hundreds of thousands of people gathered on the streets and surprised the international community with a vibrant and mobilized civil society. The Ukrainian people had not been active in protecting their civil rights up until then. They had felt defeated and discouraged by the mass corruption of the Ukrainian government. But the Ukrainian citizens proved in the Orange Revolution that they would not accept such massive electoral fraud and therefore it would seem like the

“weakness” of civil society cannot be blamed for contributing to a lack of democratization in Ukraine.

I believe external actors can have a wide influence on regime change but to what extent they are able to affect democratization is questionable. They can offer help to democratize, they can serve as an incentive to democratize or they can negatively affect democratization by practicing their power over smaller and less powerful states. Both the EU and Russia have had a limited influence on democratization in Ukraine. Neither external actor has interfered so much in Ukraine’s domestic politics that it has become either a major obstacle to democratization, or that it has enhanced the level of democracy to a large extent. Those two actors can though have a much more effect than they do already. EU could offer Ukraine membership and that could encourage Ukraine to undergo a democratic transition. Because Ukraine is in debt to Russia, Russia could use that to its advantage and for example force Ukraine to pay back large amounts of loans or put economic sanctions on the country. That could damage Ukraine’s economy and result in worsening living standards for the public which would probably mean less focus on democratic reforms on behalf of the government. However, this situation has not emerged in Ukraine and therefore, external actors are not to blame for the lack of democratization.

Nation-building has been a difficult task for the Ukrainian government due to the persistence of the regional, ethnic and linguistic division of the country. The political elite have struggled to strike a balance between the two dominant groups of Ethnic Ukrainians and Eastern Slavics. Despite this and the fact that within Ukraine there is an autonomous republic, relations between the groups and nations that reside in Ukraine have been peaceful since its independence. Still, the regionalization could pose some problems to the task of democratization. The Orange Revolution was the most regionally divided of any democratic revolution where the majority of protestors were from the central and western part of the country but eastern Ukrainians were opposed to the protests and did not support them.¹⁴⁸ The disunity of ethnic groups in different parts of the country can thus lead to difficulties in reaching an agreement as to how democratic reforms should be carried out and the eastern and more pro-Russia part of the country can prevent the election of democratic and reform-minded leaders.

¹⁴⁸ Taras Kuzio, “Nationalism, identity and civil society in Ukraine: Understanding the Orange Revolution,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43 (2010): 285.

The fact that the party system in Ukraine is extremely regionalized and the prominent political parties mostly consist of oligarchs plays a huge role in the lack of democracy in the political leadership of the country. This has resulted in a failed democratic transition in Ukraine. Under the leadership of Kravchuk and Kuchma, Ukraine was in a state of competitive authoritarianism where the personal political elite of the president dominated the political scene which was very corrupt. There were regular abuses of civil rights as opposition leaders and independent journalists were harassed. After the Orange Revolution took place, everyone expected democracy to replace competitive authoritarianism but that was not the case. The leaders of the revolution fell into a pattern similar to those of their former counterparts and the political leadership of the country remained in the hands of oligarchs, even though a new political system emerged, at least from a theoretical viewpoint.

In Ukraine's political system after the Orange Revolution, there are signs of both competitive authoritarianism and pluralism by default. The revolution leader who became president, Viktor Yushchenko, had a very difficult time controlling his allies and parliament which led to certain pluralism in the political system. The elite were fragmented as the theory of pluralism by default asserts but was still guilty of plenty of corruption "behind the scene" which is one of the components of the theory of competitive authoritarianism.

The key obstacle to Ukraine's democratization is thus the continuation of oligarchic power and regionalization. The oligarchs actually came to power on a regional base where many people vote for the candidate from their region, expecting to gain benefits from the candidates' parliamentary presence. The institutionalization of oligarchic parties in Ukrainian politics has heavily harmed the potential of a democratic transition. It is difficult for non-regionalized parties to gain any real power, as the political behavior of voting for the party most likely to support their region seems to be rooted deeply into Ukrainian society. The public was ready to vote for a "democratic" party in the Orange Revolution, but most of the voters came from the central and western regions, from where these "democratic" leaders, actually just oligarchs in a temporary "democratic disguise" also came.

Democratization in Ukraine has failed so far because the regionalization of political power has led to a political system featuring parties with oligarchs whose main interest is to serve their own needs. They are well aware that a more democratic political environment could threaten their position so they are willing to use corruption to stay in power, which prevents a more democratized Ukraine.

5.2. Belarus

The weakness of Belarus' civil society can be regarded as a contributing factor to the lack of democratization, but the main reason why it is so weak needs to be examined further. During the 1990s, Belarusian civil society was rather free, even though small and powerless. It continued to develop and by 2001 NGOs started to show signs of a capability to mobilize the citizens of the country. In order to fight against these independent organizations, the Lukashenko regime took measures to close down NGOs and a persistent oppression started to take place. Restrictions were put on the media and the state TV monopolizes the media. The weakness of Belarus' civil society is indeed a contributing factor to the lack of democracy in the country, but the blame cannot be put on the civil society itself due to its restrictive conditions. The blame should be put on the leadership of the country because that's where the restrictive conditions on the civil society originate.

External actors are not a contributing factor to the lack of democratization in the case of Belarus, since the country's leadership has to a certain extent isolated the country from the international community. Belarus has limited relations with both Russia and EU today and neither actor has had the chance to influence democratization in Belarus, whether it is positive or negative influence, due to the regime's restrictions on external influence.

Belarus's nation-building in the hands of president Lukashenko has been contradictory and only to serve the purpose of ensuring his seat in power. He has manipulated the public around his nation-building measures, which have consisted of two completely different policies. In the beginning, the nation-building measures were aimed towards the eradication of Belarusian national sentiment, language and culture. Worsening relations with Russia a few years later resulted in completely reversed measures carried out to strengthen the Belarusian national identity and sovereignty. Nation-building doesn't seem to affect the level of democracy in the country, because the people don't enjoy the freedom to oppose the nation-building policies if that is their desire. People are "forced" to develop the national sentiment that suits the regime at a specific time, so it is difficult for the people to unite around a national identity and protest the constant oppression by the government.

The party system of Belarus had the potential to develop into a stable one before Lukashenko came to power and all evidence was that pluralism by default would emerge. When the presidency was established in Belarus, all hopes of a democratic and stable party system were crushed. The introduction of the strong position of the president, which eventually resulted in a sultanistic regime has arguably been the biggest contributor to the

lack of democratization in Belarus. Democratic reforms are very unlikely to take place in a country where the leader of the country has personal rule over every aspect of society.

The theory of sultanism can be applied to the case of Belarus where president Lukashenko's political leadership is highly personalized and the political elite is made up of the president's family members and friends and even the parliament is hand-picked by the president. The fusion of private and public is high in Belarus, there is no rule of law and the political system is not governed by an official ideology. In a political society like this, the odds of a state going on a path of democratic reforms are very low. The personal control of one man and the fear of the Belarusian people of protesting his rule continue to contribute to the lack of democracy in the country.

5.3. Moldova

Moldova's civil society does not seem to be the largest contributing factor to the lack of democratization in the country. Even though the civil society is relatively weak and includes small NGOs with limited membership, people are ready to protest on the streets. During the years when the PCRM has governed, the status of the media has been labeled not free and independent media faced restrictions and journalists were harassed. The Moldovan people are not afraid to defend their civil rights but protests by Moldovan citizens seem to be a spontaneous act, rather than an organized mobilization. Thus, the civil society, even though relatively weak, cannot be regarded as the main contributor to the failure of democratization in Moldova.

External influence has not played a significant part in the democratization process in Moldova. Worsening relations with Russia affected Moldova's economy, but not necessarily to an extent where it hindered the prospects of democratization. Early in the 21st century, Moldova started to look more and more towards the EU. Up until then, the EU had not been very influential on the country's democratization. There is a greater possibility for the EU to have positive effects on Moldova with its democracy promotion in the future because Moldova has become very EU-oriented with its newly elected government.

A combination of the nation-building factor along with the political leadership and political parties can significantly explain the failure of a democratic transition in Moldova. The ethnic factor and the issues relating to having a separatist breakaway region within its territory have had a huge impact on the political system of Moldova. Ethnic and linguistic disputes were prominent in the political discourse of the political parties during the 1990s.

The theory of pluralism by default can well describe the situation in Moldova's political life until 2001 where political parties and leaders lacked real power over parliament, institutions and other aspects of the political society. From 2001 to 2009, when the Communists ruled the country, the theory of competitive authoritarianism can better apply. During that time period, the PCRM and its leader, president Voronin, dominated the political scene and practiced authoritarian acts including human and political rights violations.

I believe that two factors contribute the most to a lack of democratization in Moldova. The first factor is the focus on improving ethnic relations during the 1990s which took its toll on the governments of each time. Nation-building took a significant part of the governments' focus and time at the expense of democratic reforms. The second factor is that having a government of one-party Communist control for such a long time, one can expect the focus not to be on democratization due to the Communist non-democratic legacy. However, the PCRM actually reformed to some extent during the last few years and have become more EU-oriented. But that doesn't erase the previous authoritarian practices of the Communist government and the presence of the Communist in Moldova's political life did indeed contribute to a lack of democratization.

6. Conclusion

During the last twenty years of regime transition undergone by Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, no country has reached the status of a consolidated democracy. In the early 1990s, events in these countries hinted at a coming democratic transition, but the results of my paper underline the failure of democratization. Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova chose different paths and struggled with different problems in some areas and similar problems in other areas. All of the countries have had an unstable party system with corrupt leaders but real powers of political parties are very divergent between countries. Civil society is weak in all countries, even though restrictions and oppression vary from country to country. Nation-building has been a difficult task for all of them but nation-building policies and measures have differed between the three countries. Relations with Russia seem to be deteriorating in all cases following strengthening relations with the EU.

The likelihood of democratization for Belarus in the nearest future is minute where the president shows limited signs of giving up his authoritarian acts. The description of his regime as the “last dictatorship in Europe” is still very much applicable to the status of Belarus’ political system.

Due to Ukraine’s persistent regionalization in its political system and the institutionalization of oligarchs in power, the same conclusion can be made about Ukraine’s democratization. Even though there was a democratic revolution in the country, leaders with real democratic motives were not elected to power. The conditions for uncorrupt and genuinely democratic political parties without regional ties are very poor. Until the relevant changes occur, the prospects of a democratic transition in Ukraine remain few.

Moldova is the country most likely to undergo real democratic transition in the nearest future. The Communists have recently been swept out of office and the PCRM no longer governs the country under a one-party rule. A coalition of three reform-minded and EU-oriented parties now forms the Moldovan parliament which looks promising but their settlement on a new presidential candidate is worrying, mainly due to his communist past. The current political paralysis of the Moldovan political system makes it difficult to predict whether or not the country will go further on a path of democratic transition in the next few years or if the Communists will regain power. The number of deputies in parliament needed to elect a new president has not been reached so the coalition has provided different acting presidents in the last two years. Moldovan politicians have taken their first step towards democratization by uniting against the Communists. It will be interesting to see if the new

coalition will hold and carry out democratic reforms, or if they will fall into the same pattern as the previous elite, as was the case in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine.

A lack of democratization remains a fact for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova in their post-Soviet regime transition but there is always a possibility that these countries will overcome their internal and complex difficulties which have hitherto been an obstacle to their political alterations. It is never too late to change the path and go on a journey towards democratic transition.

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